New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1946

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Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN NEW YORK TIMES NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK POST NEW YORK DAILY NEWS NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"Maid in the Ozarks"

New York Post

JULY 16, 1946

It Came to the Belasco But It Ain't A-goin' ter Stay

By Vernon Rice

Ah've been in the Ozarks, son; ah've been in the hills of Old Kaintuck. Ah've traveled the mountins of Old Virginny and thems of Tinnesee; but by gosh and by cracky, ah ain't never did see the likes of sech as when the Ozarks came to this here city.

Them Ozarks came in one of them Broadway shows. It done come in at the Belasco, and ah's afeared it's a-goin' right out agin. It's a-called "Maid in the Ozarks" in case yuh should see it pass ye by.

It's been a-playin' up and down the land for five years. The management claimed, in them ads in the papers fer the folks that can read, that them critic fellers would say that it is the worst play that ever hit Broadway. Ah say that ad's wrong, son. It's the worst play that ever hit any place.

That ad also said that the show had been entertainin' folks all over these here United States and that 6,000,000 people can't be wrong. Well, you know what that circus feller Barnum said.

An' if yuh think ah'm a-goin' ter waste any more 'of my time a-tellin' you about it, yer crazy. Ah'm a-goin' home and go ter bed!

The New York Times

JULY 16, 1946

Dried Corn

Last night a man named Jules Pfeiffer offered something called "Maid in the Ozarks" at the Belasco Theatre. This is the play that has been traveling and playing across the country for the last five years or so. It came to New York because, its producer says, it had no place else to go. There could be an answer to that, of course. In fact, there are two ways to review "Maid in the Ozarks," a supposedly funny play about Ozark hillbillys for whose authorship Claire Parrish is willing to take credit. One would be to get wrought up and throw all the derogatory adjectives in Webster, plus some of those precious Belgian bricks at the theatre's management for permitting such insipid, dull fare to grace the stage. The other, and preferred, is to simply yield Producer Pfeiffer his due. He said in his advance advertising "that the general critical consensus will be that this play is the worst that has ever hit Broadway." From this precinct: It is.

L. F.

'MAID IN THE OZARKS.'

A play in three acts, by Claire Parrish, presented by Jules Pfeiffer at the Belasco Theater, Monday evening, July 15, 1946. The cast:

Gram Calhoun	Ervil Hart
Thad Calhoun	Larry Sherman
Mohawk	Jack Mathiesen
Bart Calvert	John Ladd
Lydia Tolliver	Johnee Williams
Temple Calhoun	Jon Dawson
Frances Tolliver	Gloria Humphreys
Cypress Young	Burman Bodel
Amy Young	Evelyn Wells Fargo
Daisy Belle	Cecile De Lucas
Miss Bleeker	Marcelle Gaudel

Herald Tribune

JULY 16, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Take to the Hills!

THOSE who anticipated a garter-snapping stage spree in "Maid in the Ozarks" went in vain to the Belasco last evening. This Claire Parrish play about the hill-billies is dull without being particularly dirty. That it has been banging around the tank towns and several provincial metropoli for several years is no credit to the offering; no discredit to its erstwhile audiences. Medicine shows have done better. Most of their entrepreneurs have had more perspicacity than to foist them off as legitimate theatrical attractions on Broadway, even in mid-summer. Any panting that will be done on Forty-fourth Street is certain to be caused solely by the heat and the humidity.

It would be simple to set down the piece as an ersatz "Tobacco Road," trading on the come-ons of that riggish folk drama. The fact is that it has a pattern all of its own. Perhaps the author had an idea of celebrating Ozark mountain customs in his original script, but the company has now settled for a few fandangoes and rude gestures. One of the female principals does a partial disrobing act that would have been booed on the Minsky circuit; a character does a passable bit of pantomime, passing out on corn likker, and an idiot boy jumps up and down at stated intervals to punctuate the nonsense. What plot there is in the proceedings is quite lost in the comic-strip cut-ups.

The advance notices of "Maid in the Ozarks" were such as to disarm the reviewers and titillate amusement-goers, particularly the statement that it would undoubtedly be hailed as the worst play to ever reach Broadway. The press agent will be disappointed, but he should be assured by an aging first-nighter that it is by no means the worst gimcrack that ever gummed up a reputable playhouse. It is merely one of the most boring.

The performers involved in the shenanigans must be resigned to their fate by this time. In any case they act that way. The prop smile and the too-emphatic bit of business accompany every slight variation in the theme. Johnee Williams has the misfortune to play the part of a city girl of doubtful virtue who hooks up with a handsome young moonshiner in them thar hills. Jon Dawson has the embarrassing assignment of the latter role. Evelyn Wells Fargo simulates a rather remarkable eye twitch, when she remembers to, as a hill-billy informer for the Ku-Klux Klan and Jack Mathiesen gibbers in the most approved fashion as a mountain moron. "Bozo" Skinkle is given credit for the carpentry. It is not too startling, but it is the best thing there is in "Maid in the Ozarks."

The Sun

JULY 16, 1946

'Maid in the Ozarks,' Hillbilly Comedy at Its Worst, Has Premiere at Belasco.

For some five or six years now Claire Parrish's hillbilly comedy, "Maid in the Ozarks," has been meandering east from Los Angeles. Last evening it stumbled into town and onto the stage of the Belasco Theater. The sooner it moves back to the tank towns the better.

Before "Maid in the Ozarks" reached Manhattan, Jules Pfeiffer, its sponsor, was predicting that it would be voted "the worst play that has ever hit Broadway." Even though "worst" is a strong adjective and "ever" covers a considerable piece of time, the producer shouldn't have too much trouble today in gathering a sizable quorum from last night's long suffering audience to declare him right. Hackneyed in plot and dialogue and played with the leer as its predominating note, Miss Parrish's dull fable of what happened when an Arkansas moonshiner brought a girl from town to his primitive home as his prospective bride has not one single thing to recommend it either as drama, comedy, or good roughhouse burlesque.

As for the acting, mercifully it isn't often that first nighters here are asked to sit before quite so many atrociously bad performances. Ervil Hart as Gram Calhoun, the matriarch of the hillbilly clan and Jack Mathiesen as a half-witted boy did give a hint that under more favorable circumstances they might come up with some good playing, but the others seemed too engrossed in striving to wring guffaws from jests about the Ozarks' lack of plumbing and the crudities of mountaineer romance to bother about creating real characters.

At the close of the second act there were loud thumpings off stage. According to the script, these were meant to portray the efforts of a particularly repulsive hag to escape from captivity. The old-timers in last night's audienee felt certain, however, that they were really shades from the era of David Belasco protesting violently over the tawdry bit of trash that had just been tossed behind the footlights of what was long his favorite playhouse.

HERRICK BROWN.

Journal American

JULY 16, 1946

'Maid in the Ozarks' At Belasco Theatre

By JIM O'CONNOR

"Maid in The Ozarks" arrived at the Belasco Theatre last night. It was opened by mistake. Regrets and apologies.

If it's there a week from tonight it'll be only because there are enough "hicks" in New York to furnish an audience of the "come-on" variety. The hill-billy what-is-it-? is strictly for the boob trade, a la the French postcard gimmick.

Advance reports of sexy stuff in the raw—with a thrill here and a shock there—proved unfounded.

"Maid in The Ozarks" is about as naughty as old neighbor Amy Young's long drawers, which she showed (for a few inches) as she galloped across the stage.

* * *

Daring Producer

The dialogue and business were at times vulgar, but they never rose to the heights of being spicy.

And the only daring performance was by the producer, one Jules Pfeiffer.

Mr. Pfeiffer boasts in the program that he put on "Maid in The Ozarks" without a stage designer, without a lighting effects expert, without a costume designer.

He could add that he put on "Maid in The Ozarks" without an actress, without an actor, without a stage director—without even a play. But he did have (and still has) a good advertising agent and a good press agent.

An amateurish caricature of mountain folks, this alleged comedy is ludicrous without being funny. As a matter of stage reporting, it's really sad. It's not even as good as those 10—20—30 "mellerdrammers" we used to see in Hoboken during Prohibition.

* * *

Six Years on Way

Perhaps the trouble is that "Maid in The Ozarks" hasn't had a sufficient workout on the road. After all, the play has been on tour only six years before being rushed onto Broadway.

Probably 66 years are needed to whip such a play into proper shape. For there's nothing wrong with "Maid in The Ozarks" that couldn't be fixed by just folding up the whole show—but quick.

There are no outstanding members of the cast, even relatively. In fact, mercy will not permit me to hold them up to public ridicule and scorn by naming them.

Nor was there any plot by Playwright (?) Claire Parrish that is worthy of appraisal. As one character on stage said:

"Allus there's a heap of talking."

There surely was!

* * *

Not Quite Champ

It's my guess that Producer Pfeiffer hoped that "Maid in The Ozarks" would be so bad that it would be good; that paying customers would flock to the Belasco to see "The Worst Play on Broadway."

Unfortunately, it isn't that bad. It's just bad enough to be dull and boring.

But don't ask me why Hollywood put up with it for 86 weeks, Chicago for 62 weeks and Ottumwa, Iowa, for one whole night. I don't even understand that atom bomb.

Incidentally, it's estimated that 6,000,000 people already have seen "Maid in The Ozarks" in more than a dozen cities. Maybe that's what is wrong with the country today!

DAILY NEWS

JULY 16, 1946

'Maid In The Ozarks' Lives Up To All of Its Advance Threats

By ROBERT SYLVESTER

In this bitter age when books like "The Hucksters" shock us with news that radio advertising is dishonest, it's nice to discover that theatrical promotion still has scruples and good faith. "Maid In The Ozarks" advertised itself as the worst play in the world. That's just what it is. It's also pretty funny. Better go see it.

"Maid in the Ozarks" arrived last night at the Belasco. It's the damndest, silliest thing that was ever put on a stage. But if you're a-hankering to see those old burlesque blackouts called "I'll See You in the Garden" and "The Three o'Clock Train" and five or six more forgotten classics, the Belasco is just the spot for you, bud. Wait a few days and you'll get in for cut rates, too.

"Maid" is presented by a youth named Jules Pfeiffer who used to run a cocktail bar in Chicago—20 Pretty Girls 20—and every time he thinks of "Maid" he has to fall down on the floor and roll with laughter. He's been trouping this thing for almost six years and everywhere he goes he makes money. The author, one Claire Parrish, wrote it as a bitter attack on the Ku Klux Klan and hillbilly society. Every time she thinks of the royalties she's earned she must have to fall down and laugh a little, too.

All About The Plot.

The story? No, you don't want to hear anything about the tsory. A lot of city girls get mixed up with some Lil Abner hillbillies in a canvas cabin somewhere in the mountains. The city girls have long legs and wear shorts. That's enough about the story.

Somewhere in the second act an old burly comic named Burman Bodel does the "drunk scene" of sainted Minsky memory and does it better than you've seen it in years. There are scenes at the table, with cornflakes and coffee, which would make Bozo Snyder pause for a minute. There is a hefty gal named Cecile De Lucas who makes Lana Turner look roundshouldered. And there is a character actress named Evelyn Wells Fargo—all right, so I'm a liar!—who does some facial contortions which will scare you out of a week's sleep. Also there's a girl named Gloria Humphreys who's really not bad at all.

Nobody is given credit for staging this masterpiece, which is doubtless just as well, since everybody just sort of relaxes and lets his or her mind wander anytime one member of the cast is called upon for some dramatic art.

Tremendous Production.

You could fold up the scenery of this little turkey into a small bundle and carry it from town to town on a bicycle and if the costumes are ever lost it won't matter. The nearest Thrift Shop could outfit the whole thing in five minutes and for a total expenditure of $13.49.

If you read those honest advertisements you might get the idea that this is a dirty show. But read those honest advertisements very carefully.

Would you like to be deliciously shocked? Delighted at the same time? See a daring play?

You would? Then go see "The Voice of the Turtle."

PM Exclusive

JULY 17, 1946

— *Kronenberger* —

Very Dull Dirt At the Belasco

PM Reviews

The proprietors of *Maid in the Ozarks* ran ads warning the New York critics that they would probably vote it the worst play they had ever seen. It is not quite that, but it may very well be the most offensive. Quite clearly, its polluted hillbilly primitivism is exhibited simply for guffaws, though you'd have to be pretty far gone in guffawing to indulge in any at the Belasco. For there is none of the bawdiness in *Maid in the Ozarks* that serves as a least common denominator of laughter for all levels of the human race. The emphasis is not, indeed, on bawdiness at all, but on things like belches and bedbugs. The wit is mostly at the expense of the half-wit, and the humor based on identifying human beings with hogs. *Maid in the Ozarks* is, as Dr. Johnson might have said, a feast of coprophilia and a famine of comedy. It is hardly so much a work for the theater as part of the sewage system of the arts.

There is no need to catalogue all its inducements—the relatively mild samples given above should suffice; and scarcely more need to outline its plot, which concerns the betrothal of a hillbilly moonshiner and a tarnished city waitress, who brings her sister into the backcountry with her, possibly as a bridesmaid. The young distiller is part of a backward but far from uninhibited family, and among the neighbors may be counted some bedraggled harpies and lecherous drunks.

A number of things happen, some of them four, five, six and seven times; and during breathing-spells, there is always the local color to fall back on. To deal honestly by the play, I suppose it contains two or three minutes of passable low comedy; all the rest is simply as dreary as it is dregsome. To re-apply Nunnally Johnson's celebrated remark, the people in *Maid of the Ozarks* make those in *Tobacco Road* seem like the country-club set.

—Louis Kronenberger

****

New York World-Telegram

JULY 18, 1946

'Maid in the Ozarks' An Amateurish Job

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The fact that "Maid in the Ozarks" played 86 weeks in Los Angeles and 62 in Chicago is no credit to either city.

How anyone could work in such a play, unless he hoped to get a job through it in something else, is beyond imagination. Yet how anybody could expect to get another job by associating with this is outside the realm of reason.

"Maid in the Ozarks" is crude, distasteful, amateurish and boring.

The proceedings concern two sisters from Hot Springs, Ark., waitresses down on their luck. Lydia has had a fling at bigamy but now has hooked the handsome mountaineer, Temple Calhoun, who brings them both to his eerie cabin and his eerier family.

What a Story!

In order to make a little dough on the side, presumably mad money, Lydia elects to pose in the nude for an artist. The mountain women feel called upon to tar and feather her for this breach of etiquette, so she skips with the artist. Since nobody liked Lydia much anyway, it is OK with all when Temple marries her sister, whose petty exterior covers a heart of gold.

Ladled into this mess of sourbelly and sassafras root are sordid transparencies of all the traditional hill-billy types. There is the manual laboring matriarch whose painful philosophy takes occasional refuge in high-school locker-room humor.

There is the hero's brother who wants to join a medicine show, but spends his time inanely giggling and rubbing knees with a plump neighboring brat. An adopted idiot is not even interestingly abhorrent.

A talkative neighbor is required to get drunk on corn liquor in the style of a circus clown, with the timing of a burlesque blackout. His meddling wife makes a dreary spectacle in attempting comic effects by blacking out a tooth and gesturing in Boy Scout semaphore.

Crude Humor.

Winding up this misguided parade is an incredibly performed social worker.

The humor that has been described as making audiences "howl their heads off" consists of gurgling leers at female anatomy and references to bedbugs or mail-order catalogs. Perhaps those audiences simply preferred having their heads off.

The only member of the cast who comes through with a semblance of professionalism is Miss Gloria Humphreys as the more admirable of the city sisters. Miss Humphreys has presence and a sense of humor through the broad playing required of her.

The collar-ad looking Jon Dawson is pictorially heroic if little else. Ervil Hart and Burman Bodel reveal a certain sense of knowing how to get around a stage and make lines understood. Otherwise they and the rest of the cast are due condolences.

"Tidbits of 1946"

New York Herald Tribune

JULY 9, 1946

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

No Choice Morsel, This

THE new show at the Plymouth is aptly named. "Tidbits of 1946," is a random assortment of vaudeville canapes, with an abundance of crumbs. The title may be laudably unpretentious, but that does not make the entertainment more tasty. There are such knowing clowns as Joey Faye, Jack Diamond and Joshua Shelley engaged in the current variety shenanigans. There is an affable m. c. in the person of Lee Trent and Josef Marais & Miranda contribute several fetching South African folk songs in both Boer and English. Still and all, this Arthur Klein production is neither a credit to the theater proper, nor a happy omen for the return of vaudeville. A lot of showmanship will be necessary before there is a "Tidbits of 1947."

* * *

Sam Locke wishes to take credit for the sketches and their direction. He is a brave man. For there is no more than half an idea in any of his tidbits and frequently this is obscured in projection. "Psychiatry in Technicolor," "In a Jeep" and "The Man Who Came to Heaven" are the most ambitious of the skits. Suffice it to say that they are very sorry indeed when topped by the venerable "Meet Me on Flugle Street." As you may have guessed Faye is the wheelhorse in these semi-satirical attempts to simulate a revue. He is in there performing, but he is forced to fight his material for most of the way.

* * *

The piece was first tried out at the Barbizon Plaza for "experimental performances." It is difficult to believe that the experiment could have fooled the present sponsors so badly. There are agreeable moments in "Tidbits of 1946."

Much of it is like a party where people get up and do their favorite parlor tricks. If they happen to suit your fancy, well and good. Too many of the turns at the Plymouth are in the nature of awkward improvizations, which must embarass the actors as much as the spectators.

* * *

Trent does an easy job of introducing the acts and might well have had a hand in more of them. Josephine Boyer is excellent as a dead-pan assistant of Faye; Eddy Manson works tricky sonorities with a harmonica and The Debonairs dance on and off beat in rather familiar terpsichorean arrangements. Meanwhile there are Josef Marais and Miranda in South American rhythms; Robert Marshall, in operatic selections and Muriel Gaines. "Tidbits of 1946" is a floor show in a theater and not too good a floor show. So far as vaudeville is concerned, it makes it deader than ever.

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The New York Times

JULY 9, 1946

Summer Tidbits

In what was to have been a jocose apologia at the opening of "Tidbits of 1946" last night, Lee Trent, an amiable enough master of ceremonies, remarked that this was July and the intimate musical entertainment he was about to introduce was not too ambitious. Unfortunately, one could only wish that Mr. Trent's intended humor had not been so close to the truth. For "Tidbits of 1946," which Arthur Klein brought to the Plymouth Theatre in association with Harry Schumer, could have done with considerably more ambition even for July. As it is, it is an uneven affair saved by an occasional high spot.

"Tidbits of 1946" started out as a Youth Theatre Alumni presentation at the Barbizon-Plaza. With hardly any of the original cast remaining, it has now been transplanted, and since this reviewer did not see it uptown, there is no basis for comparison. Yet it is difficult to understand what impelled the Messrs. Klein and Schumer to think it ought to move. In the cast now are Joey Faye, Josephine Boyer, Muriel Gaines, the Debonaires and others. What they have to offer probably would make a good bill for some night club. In the theatre their material adds up to slowly paced variety.

If it is necessary to admit a few kind words, then these should be passed out to Mr. Faye for some funny moments, to the Debonaires for their usual tap-dancing stint and to Josef Marais and Miranda, who sing some pleasant folk tunes from the Veld of South Africa. For record, the sketches were written and directed by Sam Locke, and the over-all supervision was Mr. Kelin. For this morning, this is a reminder that this is July.

L. F.

'TIDBITS OF 1946.'

An intimate revue with sketches written and directed by Sam Locke; orchestra under the direction of Phil Romano; produced under the personal supervision of Arthur Klein; presented by Arthur Klein in association with Harry Schumer at the Plymouth Theater, Monday evening, July 8, 1946. The cast includes Joey Faye, Muriel Gaines, Lee Trent, Josef Marais and Miranda, Carmen and Rolando, Eddy Manson, Robert Marshall, Joshua Shelley, Josephine Boyer, Jack Diamond, The Debonairs, the Mack Triplets and Candido.

PM Exclusive

JULY 10, 1946

Kronenberger

A Flat-Tasting Summer Drink

Broadway, which spends most of the Summer snoozing, lifted its drowsy head and yawned itself half-awake Monday night in an intimate revue called *Tidbits of 1946*. At the end, the audience was just about as somnolent as the show.

Tidbits began life as a little revue which the American Youth Theater offered at the Barbizon-Plaza last Spring. It was an exceedingly uneven little revue, by no means up to Broadway standards, but at the Barbizon-Plaza it had a youthful, likeable spirit that kept it going in an off-Broadway way. The present *Tidbits*, produced by Arthur Klein, has retained very little of the previous one, and has quite lost the old likeableness. Almost all the faces at the Plymouth are new to the show, but almost all the goings-on are depressingly familiar to show business. The new *Tidbits* is clogged with routine and even ragged night-club and vaudeville acts that have the show plummeting right from the start. And as master of ceremonies, Lee Trent cannot even cushion the fall.

* * *

Joey Faye, a nice little guy who keeps getting scripts that have lumps in them, has the main comedy assignment, sweating through some monumentally uncomical material. Monday night even the famous *Flugle St.* skit seemed to fall pretty flat, and none of the others ever got high enough to fall. On the specialties side of the program, neither Eddie Manson with his harmonica, Robert Marshall with his singing, nor Carmen and Rolando with their Cuban dances were at all exciting; and the Mack Triplets, with their girlie-girlie ditties, were painful. Two of the pleasantest things in the show are holdovers from its Barbizon-Plaza days: Josef Mirais and Miranda, and Muriel Gaines. The other pleasant performance, though there is too much of it, is the dancing of the Debonairs. And a young lady named Josephine Boyer gives promise of being something of a comedienne when better material comes her way.

Tidbits clearly attempted the sort of light, informal show—the theatrical equivalent of hammock reading—that goes with hot weather. But it emerges a hodge-podge, deficient in skill and wholly wanting in showmanship.

—Louis Kronenberger

New York Post

JULY 9, 1946

No Improvement Noted In the Revamped 'Tidbits'

By Vernon Rice

Today I have the unhappy privilege of eating my words in print.

Early in April there opened an unpretentious intimate revue at the Barbizon-Plaza entitled "Tidbits of '46" under the sponsorship of the Youth Theatre Alumni. The members of the group, for the most part, had all been off to war, and the show was a sort of a reunion, playing only on the week ends among friends and well-wishers.

It had its faults, to be sure, but in its own unassuming way it had a great deal of charm. As a matter of fact, I went so far as to say it was quality entertainment.

Then something happened. Someone along the line must have gotten big ideas, for last night Arthur Klein in association with Henry Schumer brought "Tidbits" to Broadway and presented the revue at the Plymouth.

It isn't the same "Tidbits" I saw last April. It's been recast, dressed up and revamped. From the old crew were kept the South African folk singers, Josef Marais and Miranda; Muriel Gaines, the cafe singer; Eddy Manson, who plays the harmonica, and two sketches, not very good.

From hereon out, the something new has been added.

The comedy spots held by Phil Leeds and Jerry Jaraslow have been filled by Joey Faye and Jack Diamond. Deadpan Sherle Hartt, who has the instincts of a true comedienne, has been replaced by a new arrival to our town by way of Canada, Cincinnati, Chicago, Pittsburgh and points west, Josephine Boyer; Russian folk singer Mordy Bauman has been dislodged by opera singer Robert Marshall, and the dancing trio—Jane Dudley, Sophie Maslow and William Bales—has been cast aside for a Cuban dancing duo, Carmen and Rolanda.

Add Lee Trent to act as master of ceremonies, Joshua Shelley and a tall, blonde, sexy-looking babe, whose name seems to be omitted from the program, to assist in the sketches; the tapping quintet, The Debonairs, and the Mack Triplets, one of those harmonizing sister acts; stir well, and you've got the "Tidbits" the Messrs. Klein and Schumer brought to the Plymouth.

What it was these gentlemen were after in making these changes and substitutions is hard to determine. What they achieved is just another routine, slow-moving vaudeville revue, completely without distinction.

What they could have had, had they kept the show intact, might have been a show not without flaws and faults, but one that was simple and modest with a special quality all its own.

Pardon me while I continue eating those words.

I'm choking on "charm" and "quality."

DAILY NEWS

JULY 9, 1946

Some Excuse Needed For 'Tidbits of 1946' At The Plymouth

By ROBERT SYLVESTER

Only a few editions ago you found yourself longing for the return of vaudeville and last night, sho 'nuff, back it came. It was called "Tidbits of 1946" and arrived at The Plymouth Theatre. It not only cured you of vaudeville but also practically cured you of longing.

It's needlessly cruel, probably, to knock a little show as unpretentious as this. But not quite as cruel as the producers, Arthur Klein and The Youth Theatre, in demanding that the public pay money to see it. This is one of those shows with no scenery at all and a lot of talent. But when this type of operation goes wrong it can have all the talent in the world and still look awful.

Joey Faye, for example, is a fine, sympathetic comedian with a world of experience. You have seen him do some first rate jobs in musicals, burlesque, vaudeville and straight plays. In "Tidbits" he tries to carry some of the most childish material ever written. He was listed to do his famous "Flugle Street" next-to-closing, but long before "Tidbits" got close to closing it was far past this reporter's deadline.

Muriel Gaines, a Negro singer who looks and sounds good in small night clubs, sounds in this show as if she had no melody in her voice at all. A big, handsome fellow named Lee Trent, who has taken a long look or two at Frank Fay, started out all right but weakened in the homestretch. Of all the acts, the one that stood up best was a dancing quintet called The Debonairs. Second honors went to a harmonica soloist named Eddy Manson.

The Debonairs will be remembered from revues and vaudeville of the pre-war era. They have some good mechanical dance routines built on sight comedy as well as adequate hoofing. Of the other acts, Josef Marais and Miranda sing "African Veld" songs which just sound old-folksy; Josephine Boyer does a ballet burlesque which must prove she's never seen a ballet; Jack Diamond works with Faye, Robert Marshall sings loud; Carmen and Rolando do poor Cuban dancing, and Joshua Shelley doesn't seem to know what he's doing. The Mack Triplets sounded better in the 10,000-seat Flushing Stadium than they did at the Plymouth.

There were, according to the lobby gossips, all sorts of excuses for everybody. The man who was staging the sketches walked out. The Youth Theatre walked out, charging producer Klein with having too many friends who stopped the show in the wrong places. Klein stayed in, charging the Youth Theatre with no talent. The stage manager was replaced 15 minutes before show time. The orchestra was unrehearsed. And so on ad infinitum, ad nauseum and Ad Wolgast.

Well, there must have been a lot of excuses for "Tidbits of 1946." But no excuse for opening it the way it was last night.

Maybe, of course, it will get better. A little show like this could keep a lot of people working during the dull dog days.

New York World-Telegram

JULY 9, 1946

'Tidbits of '46' Gives Little to Chew On

By Robert Bagar

A mild, rather inept revue had a less than auspicious opening at the Plymouth last evening. The piece, presented by Arthur Klein in association with Henry Schumer, had had several performances, with an entirely different cast (I'm told) at the Barbizon Plaza earlier this season. Those were the seed, one may presume, and the hypoed plant struggled unavailingly at the Plymouth, lacking, as it did, the substance of life. The previous showings had been a germ of the Youth Theater Alumni, and so much for beginnings.

"Tidbits of 1946" would be an excellent title for a production, if 1946 had anything to do with it. Most of the sketches, by Sam Locke, looked longingly and nostalgically toward Washington Irving's venerable Kaaterskills. And the continuity given to Lee Trent, a tall and personable emcee, furnished little food for either thought or comedy.

Besides intimacy and informality, simplicity was what the producers of "Tidbits" were obviously after — simplicity and economy. They have not proved successful in the first, although eminently in the second. This divertissement boasts no sets or costumes by celebrities nor does it boast sets or costumes at all, but merely backdrops, clothing and a handful of props. There is no chorus line, and there is no original score, the music being taken from among contemporary—or fairly so—items.

Like Nightclub Skit.

In this atmosphere appeared a number of competent artists, the sum total of whose labors, ironically, comprised a floor show in a nightclub. Nothing's wrong with a good floor show, understand, except that it belongs in a nightclub. Among the glittering mirrors, spanking waiters and rattling dishware of a bistro "Tidbits" shaved down to fit, could be an acceptable show. Not so on Broadway, however, where the audience's attention lacks the seductive appeal of food, drink and noisy chit-chat.

In Joey Faye this entertainment has a capable comic, made the more so by the deadpan antics of Jack Diamond, his foil. They stem right out of burlesque, or environs, and the things they did have mostly been seen and heard before.

Skit on 'Spellbound.'

True, the sketch "Psychiatry in Technicolor," with Faye, Josephine Boyer, Diamond and Joshua Shelley, was inspired by the movie "Spellbound," a contemporary work, but the travesty is wheel burlesque to the letter. Another of the sketches is the familiar "Meet Me on Flugle Street," a perennial favorite of the maisons de strip. This time it had hysterical variations which took a good deal from the earthy comedy it possesses in quantity.

Josef Marais and Miranda, a close-working team of folk singers, gave real pleasure with their unaffected and charming delivery of songs from the African Veldt. Muriel Gaines, too, was likable in her stylistic singing.

Others in Revue.

The newly imported Cuban dance team of Carmen and Rolando, plus bongo drummer Candido, labored valiantly, although the duo wanted the gloss and finish of other such combinations seen hereabouts. A quintet of male dancers with some amusing material, the Debonaires, found favor with the audience. And Eddy Manson, harmonica player, demonstrated a special skill in the clever arrangements he had done for this limited instrument. The tenor, Robert Marshall, sang pieces ranging from the pop to the operatic engagingly. And a last minute addition—or so Trent indicated—the Mack Triplets did a not too unusual routine of harmonized songs. Miss Boyer contributed a satiric song or two, besides appearing in the skits.

Some of the evening's sung music was done with piano accompaniment. Phil Romano directed the orchestra capably, with an occasional moment of rhythmic insecurity. Sherry Williams, an Eiffel Tower of a girl, did walk-ons, some of them with bit talk, in the interest of the sketches.

The Sun

JULY 9, 1946

'Tidbits of 1946,' an Intimate and Dull Revue, Has Premiere at Plymouth.

It has been Arthur Klein's belief, apparently, that what this town needed to make it forget the summer heat was a breezy and intimate little revue. If so, the Youth Theater's "Tidbits of 1946," which he, in association with Henry Schumer, placed upon the stage of the Plymouth Theater last evening, is hardly the show to prove his point.

In the more informal quarters of the Barbizon Plaza's theater, where it was originally presented for five experimental performances, several weeks ago, "Tidbits" may have seemed a bright bit of youthful fooling. In the harsher glare of West Forty-fifth street, it comes off merely as a wabbly and amateurish hodge-podge of vaudeville and night-club turns, with precious little to offer in the way of distinction, or entertainment either.

For the few brief moments that the Debonairs are nimbly dancing about, depicting first the wonders of this machine age, and later the trials of a Navy chief, "Tidbits" is the kind of show Klein obviously intended it to be all the way through. The Debonairs' tapping is skillful, and their routines have imagination. It takes more than one topnotch act to put over a vaudeville bill, however.

Joey Faye and Jack Diamond bear the brunt of the comedy load, and they showed last night that with better material they might have stirred up some genuine hilarity in the rough-house vein. The sketches, which Sam Locke has provided, however, are, for the most part, flat and uninspired. At that, Faye and Diamond did wangle a few hearty laughs out of their jeep number and their Flugle street burlesque skit.

Lee Trent, a Texan with a pleasant personality, acts as master of ceremonies, and under happier circumstances might have strung the acts together quite neatly. In "Tidbits" he doesn't have much to work with, however, and his worst mistake last night was in letting the performers come dashing back for encores at the first handclap.

Others on the bill included Muriel Gaines and Josephine Boyer, whose night club songs lost a lot of their effectiveness in a big auditorium; Josef Marais and Miranda, whose South African songs could have held considerable novelty and charm if kept within bounds; Eddy Manson, who performs musical feats on the harmonica, and Robert Marshall, who has a powerful and good voice, more fitted to the concert stage than to a Broadway revue.

One feminine skeptic in the audience arrived last night armed with at least three novels and a couple of magazines. She never did get around to reading them, but then she left before the proceedings were over.

HERRICK BROWN.

Journal American

JULY 9, 1946

'Tidbits of '46' Opens At Plymouth Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

A helpless, hapless, hopeless little show found its warm weather way last night into 45th st. and proceeded to die by inches right up on the stage of the Plymouth Theatre. "Tidbits" was its title. "Tidbits of 1946," although "Tidbits of 1906" would have been the more seemly designation. Working itself all evening up to an unhappy rehash of "Flugle Street," the "intimate musical entertainment" seldom had a chance.

With all the good critical intentions in the world, I can't for the life of me see how one Arthur Klein, in association with another Henry Schumer, could possibly have imagined that such a varicose vaudeville would go. And by "go" I don't mean "go" the way it's going to go. Neither you, nor Mr. Klein nor Mr. Schumer nor I, can fashion an "intimate musical entertainment" without intimacy, music or a dash of entertaining material.

To come right out and say so "Tidbits of 1906"—I beg your pardon, "Tidbits of 1946"—has no one of these attributes. The sketches, blamed on the Samuel Locke who also directed them, are long-drawn and pointless. The music, which should be credited to the Richard Rodgers of "Carousel" and the revamped version of "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court," is nothing when it isn't "June Is Bustin' Out All Over" and "To Keep My Love Alive."

And the singers, the dancers and the funny men are of no assistance whatsoever. I don't see how they could be!

* * *

Lee Apologizes

Let me explain. "Tidbits of 1946" gets under way with an "Apologia" by Lee Trent, a personable young apologist who worked his way north from San Antonio to Chicago, where he took to radio; west from Chicago to Hollywood, where he took to pictures; east from Hollywood to New York, where he took to burlesque. For the past year (and I quote) "he has acted as conferencier for some of the leading bistros"—whatever that turn of phrase may mean!

Now, he apologizes pleasantly for the mistake-with-music at the Plymouth, clearing, if not exactly cheering, the way for Eddy Manson, who makes with the mouth-organ a la Borrah Minnevitch; for Carmen and Rolando, who make with the samba a la Betty Garrett; for Robert Marshall, who makes with the "Vesti la Giubba" a la Willie Howard, and Josephine Boyer, who makes with the "L'Apres-midi d'un faune" a la Imogene Coca. A thankless exoneration.

This, if memory serves, in the opening stanza. After the intermission, from which Mr. Trent thanked us kindly for returning, the relentless tidbiters did the whole thing over again, with a jolly little ballad programmed as "Never Kill Your Mother on Mother's Day" omitted. Instead, Muriel Gaines dirtied up "The Lass With the Delicate Air" and cleaned up "To Keep My Love Alive." Neither was improved by moral readjustment. Especially the latter.

Personally, I prefer Miss Gaines down on the floor at Le Ruban Bleu rather than up on the stage at the Plymouth.

* * *

Joey Doesn't

This "Tidbits of 1946" is the show which was to give Joey Faye his big chance at breaking on to Broadway. "Allah Be Praised," they tell you, wasn't right for Joey. Joey, they go on to say, wasn't right for "The Duchess Misbehaves." Be these as they may, there's little doubt that "Tidbits of 1946" and Joey Faye, or Joey Faye and "Tidbits of 1946," aren't right for one another. There's not one good laugh in an evening full of trying.

Jack Diamond, Joey's helper in "Psychiatry in Technicolor," an unsavory disconsolation; "In a Jeep," the Minsky pickup gag in cast-off military equipment, and "Flugie Street," the unhappy rehash of one of burlesque's major classics, is a better knockabout comedian than his fellow funnyman can ever hope to be. Give Jack half a chance and he'll make a whole chance out of it. His, it seems to me, is the true lowdown comic spirit.

What's left ranges from fair to middling. From The Debonairs, who do everything in unison, be it a "Ballet Mecanique" after George Anthiel or a "Step This Way" after almost anything, to the Marais and Miranda who sing South African songs from off the veldt and deserve a more hightoned Manhattan hearing. And, as I'd almost fortunately forgotten, the three non-Andrew Sisters who are up from Flushing Meadow to sing about Central Park and its nocturnal goings-on...

My dictionary tells me that a "tidbit" is a "titbit," that a "titbit" is a "choice morsel." How that Webster can lie!